



## Kenton County Police Officer Steve Benner

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From over his right shoulder, empty faces on his “Wall of Shame” peer out into a detective’s office now instead of into the shadows of the World Wide Web. Those faces, each marked with their victims — and their convictions — keep Kenton County Police Officer Steve Benner going each day as he seeks to protect our children from those who would steal their innocence. Talking to men whose goal is the unspeakable. Stopping them in their tracks when they cross the line — it’s complex, detailed and disgusting. But knowing that he could change someone’s story, he said, makes it all worthwhile.

**I have been in law enforcement since 1995.** I started with Elsmere Police Department, went to Northern Kentucky University Police, Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Airport Police and then here. I kept getting closer to home. Now I’m two miles away. It’s nice. I have been with Kenton County Police Department since 1999.

**I was working in the Bureau of Investigation** and I was trained in International Crimes Against Children. With the case load I had, there was no way I could get online and chat. That takes a lot of time. I was certified in it but not able to do it. When my five years were up in the B of I, I went back to patrol. I asked if I could still do the ICAC work and they said yes. So I started doing this in 2009.

**I’m a patrolman first.** If those guys need me on the road, I have to drop what I’m doing. If they really need me, no matter what I’m doing, I’m dropping it. Unless we have a child who’s actively being molested, then we need to take care of that.

**I take all my calls from my desk.** When I do get a call that needs to take me away from the desk, one of my sergeants or one of the other guys in patrol will say, ‘Hey, can you take that call or do you need to keep going?’ Sometimes I’m collecting information from a suspect that is sensitive, and in that, I don’t call the shots, they do. They say when they’re coming online, they say what they’re going to say and they show me what they’re going to show me. I can never initialize or escalate a conversation. Everything is up to them; I just have to be available and online.

“You give someone what they think is anonymity and the communication tools to do this, and you’re going to see the real person.”

**It’s tricky because you have to know** what they know and try to think what they’re thinking. It gets a little confusing sometimes. I have the people I’ve talked to divided into groups of those who are confirmed living in Kentucky and those who have crossed the line.

**There are ways they try to figure out** who’s on the other line. I had one guy ask me to send him a word document. I was already privy to that, so I did. In the properties of a word document it says who that Microsoft Word belongs to — Kenton County Police Department or (Benner’s cover name). We’ve been down that road. They want to see pictures of you, video of you; they want to talk to you on the phone to make sure you’re real.

**I prefer to get them in Kentucky, but** when I put myself out there in a chat room, I don’t know who’s going to contact me. For instance, one of these guys was in Switzerland. He sent me a webcam and wanted to see the girl naked. He sent me all kinds of child pornography. I went through Interpol and the Swiss National Police and got him arrested. It’s just a few phone calls; some emails and Google translate.

**Any one of these guys could travel tomorrow and say, ‘Let’s do this.’** So every time I meet someone new who has crossed the line, they get a file. I have 274 files in here. That’s 274 people who have contacted me and crossed the line.

**I don’t ever catch two guys the same way.** There’s so many different ways to get caught because it’s on a computer that duplicates and stores everything. I use a program called Camtasia that records my entire screen. It records my mouse clicks, it shows my mouse moving across the screen. It records audio and video. I show that to a jury, and when they find out I have that, they know I have them lock, stock and barrel.

**You give someone what they think is anonymity** and the communication tools to do this, and you’re going to see the real person.

For some reason, they like to show little girls what they’re doing.

**The only overwhelming feeling I get is** not being able to back up my officers when I’m in here. Usually, I’d be out on the road and can zoom right over to that traffic stop to back someone up. That bothers me. Seeing this stuff — I just know they’re perverts and I need to get them. I really get steamed when I find out there’s a kid being abused because then I go after them 100 percent. That’s my ultimate goal, to stop any abuse.

**I went to New Jersey and accepted an award** for police meritorious service for one of the victims there. This guy was talking to me, a 13-year-old girl, and he said he’s a woman. He was sending me pictures of a woman saying, ‘This is me,’ and all the pictures were dressed and at different ages. It was really weird. I thought, ‘Why is a pervert sending me pictures of a clothed woman? Is it really her or someone else?’ It turned out he was sending me pictures of his daughter. Then he started sending me pictures of a naked woman and said, ‘This is me, I get undressed and take pictures of myself.’ It was obvious to me these were not the same woman. He thinks he’s talking to a 13 year old, maybe he thought she wouldn’t notice.

**The naked woman he was sending me pictures of was always** lying down. At times her hand would be drawn up and her legs had no muscle tone. I was thinking, this is obviously a handicapped person. It turned out it was his other daughter, who was about 18. She has the mentality of a 6-month-old baby. No physical capability — has to be fed, diapered, everything. He is supposed to be taking care of her and he’s sending naked pictures of her out on the Internet. I was able to put a stop to that.

**The victims out there, that’s why I do it.** Everybody has a story. These stories are live. These are the ones I want to get.

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